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THE CRAYON.

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HOME HEROICS.

JUDGING by the prevalent choice of subject among our High Art painters, we should imagine that the worth and dignity of humanity had perished, and that we must be for ever raising monuments in commemoration of their former existence. Not a painter scarcely dreams of finding a noble subject in his own times. Men who aim at painting *great* pictures must turn their faces backward, and journey a century or two, at least, into the mists through which the past looms up, greater than itself—mighty, only because incomprehensible—more dignified, because its faults have become obscured.

It is a curse to us perpetually—this disposition to look abroad and back for things worthy of reverence and study. It may be hopeless—we confess to something like despair thinking of it—to attempt to induce our countrymen to look near home for their ideals. Yet, hopeless as it is, on it depends the prospect of all future greatness for our Art. It is impossible that the race should have so changed, that the deeds of to-day should be less noble than those of three hundred years ago. And yet to such a conclusion would the practice of Art at this day lead: for true it is that an artist, desiring to enter what is generally known as the High Art field, rarely, if ever, takes for his subject a modern incident.

If it be not true that the race has lost its former worth, there is no other alternative than that Art is a thing of the surface merely—dealing with religious garbs and historical costumes. To admit this, is to abandon all claim for it as a moral agent, and make the Artist, after all, only a minister to the sensuous nature. We cannot willingly take such a position, since it follows, as a consequence, that Art is folly, and its worshipers, idlers. There is a vitality—an immortality—in it, though ages may overlook its messages, and leave it in degradation; and it is due to the world that the philosopher—the moralist—the statesman—do their part in giving it its birthright.

We acknowledge all the objections that can be urged against a modern standard of heroism on the score of costume—we are willing to admit that it would be difficult to conceive a beautiful or dignified figure in our nineteenth century costume, but it it is not in the power of such trifles to destroy a noble conception—true genius will ride over them, and even accomplish its ends seemingly by their aid. But, if our mere externals so limit the range of Art, then Art must mould those externals to suit it—it must change the costume, the habits, and the surroundings of men.

And if this, which we believe to be easy, were impossible, still it must be felt that the true end of Art is the expression of the inner nature—the characteristics of the soul. It must be felt that there is a Beauty which will shine through all externals, and will insist on being seen through rags even, and the representation of this will make Art noble and worthy, without regard to forms or material appearances. The true Artistic Beauty will redeem even an ugly garb in which it may chance to be dressed, and to those who are capable of seeing through its disguises, will sanctify the homeliest guise.

The true secret of the attainment of High Art, then, is not in the draping of models, but in the education of our inner selves to the perception of that which is noblest and most beautiful in the soul of man—the god-like and heavenly. The artist has learned the secret of that attainment when he has made his own soul noble and beautiful, for only then can he see the nobility and beauty in others. We shall never make a grand school of Art, by sending artists where they have facilities for studying middle-age costumes, or the habits of the so-called heroic ages, but by our artists becoming lofty in their natures, and conscientious in their labors and regards both of Nature and Art. That is the highest Art which tells the grandest truths, and the grandest truths will be told by the grandest souls, without regard to age or locality.

There is a heroism in the commonest true life worthy an Art mightier than that of Phidias—subjects more fraught with high and holy meaning than any the Middle Age has given us, in the history of every suffering, aspiring heart. Sorrows are thrown before our eyes every day, if we were capable of reading them, which would benefit the world for ever if once well told; and no man can be a true artist without finding in his own history that which better satisfies the definition of heroism than the actions of Greek or Crusader. They are Home Heroics that touch and better the heart—that Art which most humbly goes down into the depths of our poor human heart is the highest, best.

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Letters

ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING.

LETTER IV.

"You had better learn to make shoes," said the venerable Colonel Trumbull, one day, to a stripling who was consulting him in reference to his choice of painting as a profession, "better learn to make shoes or dig potatoes than to become a painter in this country." I felt that this was a harsh repulse to the young man, and most unexpected from such an authority. I was not then a painter, but secretly hoping to become one. I felt a strong sympathy for the victim, and thought he was unkindly treated, but I can now imagine that there might have appeared to the mind of the veteran artist sufficient ground for such advice, and that it may have been an act of kindness rather than severity. It is better to make shoes, or dig potatoes, or follow any other honest calling to secure a livelihood, than seek the pursuit of Art for the sake of gain. For whoever presumes to embrace her with the predominant motive of pecuniary reward, or any mere worldly distinction, will assuredly find but a bundle of reeds in his arms. The great law that provides for the sustenance of the soul through the ministry of spiritual things, has fixed an immovable barrier between its own pursuits and those which supply our physical wants. For this reason, we cannot serve God and mammon, however specious our garb of hypocrisy; and I would sooner look for figs on thistles than for the higher attributes of Art from one whose ruling motive in its pursuit is money. This is one of the principal causes operating to the degradation of Art, perverting it to the servility of a mere trade; and next to this, is its prostitution by means of excess in color, strong effects and skillful manipulation, solely for the sensuous gratification of the eye. Through such motives the Art becomes debased, and a picture so painted, be its subject landscape or figure, may well be considered but an empty decoration. But, fortunately for Art, such is not its true purpose, and it is only through the religious integrity of motive by which all real Artists have ever been actuated, that it still preserves its original purity, impressing the mind through the visible forms of material beauty, with a deep sense of the invisible and immaterial, for which end all this world's beauty and significance, beyond the few requirements of our animal nature, seems to be expressly given. And such is the verdict which the best judgment of the world, in all ages, has rendered, by awarding the highest rank to the artist who has kept in due subordination the more sensuous qualities with which material beauty is invested, thereby constituting his representation the clear exponent of that *intention* by which every earnest spirit enjoys the assurance of our spiritual nature, and scorns the subtlety and logic of positive philosophy.

Every experienced artist knows that it is difficult to see nature truly; that for this end long practice is necessary. We see, yet perceive not, and it becomes necessary to cultivate our perception so as to comprehend the essence of the object seen. The poet sees in nature more than mere matter of fact, yet he does not see more than is there, nor what another may not see when *he* points it out. His is only a more perfect exercise of perception, just as the drapery of a fine statue is seen by the common eye, and pronounced beautiful, and the enlightened observer also pronounces it beautiful; but the one ascribes it to the graceful folding, the other to its expression of the figure beneath, but neither sees more nor less in quantity than the other, but with unequal degrees of completeness, in perception. Now, the highest beauty of this drapery consists in the perfection of its disposition, so as to best indicate the beautiful form it clothes, not possessing of itself too much attractiveness, nor lose its value by too strongly defining the figure. And so should we look on external Nature.

Why have the creations of Raphael conferred on him the title of *divine?* Because he saw through the sensuous veil, and embodied the spiritual beauty with which nature is animate, and in whose presence the baser "passions shrink and tremble, and are still." It is a mistake to suppose that Raphael and other earnest minds have added anything of their own to the perfection of their common model. They have only depicted it as they saw it, in its fullness and purity, looking on it with childlike affection and religious reverence, ever watchful that no careless or presumptuous touch should mar its fair proportions. And it is the same with regard to inanimate or animate creation. Childlike affection and religious reverence for the beauty that nature presents before us, form a basis of reliance which the conflicts of opinion can never disturb. Learn first to perceive with truthfulness, and then aim to embody your perceptions; take no thought on the question of genius or of future fame; with these you have nothing to do. Seek not to rival or surpass a brother artist, and above all, let not the love of money overleap the love of Art.

To appreciate Art, cultivation is necessary, but its power may be felt without that, and the feeling will educate itself into the desired appreciation, and derive from it a corresponding degree of pleasure, according to the purity or depravity, the high or low character, of the Art that awakens it. And, as the true and the beautiful are inseparably connected, and the highest beauty with the highest truth, it follows that the most truthful picture must be the most beautiful, according to the nature of its subject. Where is the portrait-painter, having a just sense of his responsibilities, who has not often thrown down his brush in despair, after many fruitless attempts to express the soul that beams at times through the eye of beauty, and so with the yet more mysterious power of lofty intellect? And there is to be seen a corresponding soul and depth of expression in the beauty of landscape nature, which dignifies the Art that embodies it, and improves and elevates the mind that loves to contemplate its pictorial image.

But, suppose we look on a fine landscape simply as a thing of beauty—a source of innocent enjoyment in our leisure moments—a sensuous gratification with the least expenditure of thought or effort of the intellect, how much better is it than many a more expensive toy for which human skill and industry are tasked, and wealth continually lavished! How many of our men of fortune, whom nature and circumstance have well fitted for such enjoyment, surrender, as it were, their birthright, for a mess of pottage, by resorting to costly and needless luxuries, which consume, without satisfying—while Art invites to her feast of beauty, where indulgence never cloys, and entails no penalty of self-reproach!

To the rich merchant and capitalist, and to those whom even a competency has released from the great world-struggle, so far as to allow a little time to rest and reflect in, Landscape Art especially appeals—nor does it appeal in vain. There are some among "the innumerable caravan" that look to it as an oasis in the desert, and there are more who show signs of lively susceptibility to its refreshing influence—those who trace their first enjoyment of existence, in childhood and youth, with all the associations of their minority, to the country, to some pleasant landscape scenery; to such the instinct of nature thus briefly impressed, is seldom or never overcome. Witness the glad return of many an exile to the place of his nativity, and see the beautiful country-seat suddenly rising among the green trees that were young with himself, and almost regarded as playmates. He returns to end his days where they began, and loves to embellish the consecrated spot with filial tenderness, strewing flesh flowers on the grave of long-departed years. To him who preserves the susceptibility to this instinctive impulse, in spite of the discordant clamor and conflict of the crowded city, the true landscape becomes a thing of more than outward beauty, or piece of furniture.

It becomes companionable, holding silent converse with the feelings, playful or pensive—and, at times, touching a chord that vibrates to the inmost recesses of the heart, yet with no unhealthy excitement, but soothing and strengthening to his best faculties. Suppose such an one, on his return home, after the completion of his daily task of drudgery—his dinner partaken, and himself disposed of in his favorite arm-chair, with one or more faithful landscapes before him, and making no greater effort than to look into the picture instead of on it, so as to perceive what it represents; in proportion as it is true and faithful, many a fair vision of forgotten days will animate the canvas, and lead him through the scene: pleasant reminiscences and grateful emotions will spring up at every step, and care and anxiety will retire far behind him. If he possess aught of imaginative tissue, and few such natures are without it, he becomes absorbed in the picture—a gentle breeze fans his forehead, and he hears a distant rumbling; they come not from the canvas, but through the open window casement. No matter, they fall purified on his sensorium, and *that* is far away in the haunts of his boyhood—and that soft wind is chasing the trout stream down the woody glen, beyond which gleams "the deep and silent lake," where the wild deer seeks a fatal refuge. He shifts the scene, and stretching fields and green meadows meet his eye—in such he followed the plough and tossed the new-mown hay; by the road-side stands the school-house, and merry children scatter from its door—such was the place where he first imbibed the knowledge that the world was large and round, while ambition whispered that the village grounds were too narrow for him,—and with the last rays of the setting sun, the picture fades away.

I need scarcely apologize for the seeming sentimentalism of this letter. In this day the sentiment of Art is so overrun by the the *technique*, that it can scarcely be insisted on too strongly. In my next, I shall recur more minutely to the means, rather than the ends, of Art.

Yours truly,
A. B. Durand.

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The Poetry of Architecture; or the Architecture of the Nations of Europe, considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character. By Kata Phusin (John Ruskin).

No. 2.—THE COTTAGE.

1. THE LOWLAND COTTAGE.—ENGLAND AND FRANCE.

Of all embellishments by which the efforts of man can enhance the beauty of natural scenery, those are the most effective which can give animation to the scene, while the spirit which they bestow is in unison with its general character. It is generally desirable to indicate the presence of animated existence in a scene of natural beauty; but only of such existence as shall be imbued with the spirit, and shall partake of the essence, of the beauty, which without it would be dead. If our object, therefore, is to embellish a scene the character of which is peaceful and unpretending, we must not erect a building fit for the abode of wealth or pride. However beautiful or imposing in itself, such an object immediately indicates the presence of a kind of existence unsuited to the scenery which it inhabits; and of a mind which, when it sought retirement, was unacquainted with its own ruling failings, and which consequently excites no sympathy in ours: but, if we erect a dwelling which may appear adapted to the wants, and sufficient for the comfort of a gentle heart and lowly mind, we have instantly attained our object: we have bestowed animation, but we have not disturbed repose. It is for this reason that the cottage is one of the embellishments of natural scenery which deserve attentive consideration. It is beautiful always, and everywhere; whether looking out of the woody dingle with its eye-like window, and sending up the azure smoke between the silver trunks of aged trees; or grouped among the bright corn-fields of the fruitful plain;